

## Star Wars

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#### Further Conversations with Lanius

By Morrie Mullins

Master Lanius, the head of the Jedi academy on Almas, discusses recent events in an interview made somewhat bizarre by Yara Grugara. He sidesteps the issue of recent criticism of the academy, but he explains his philosophy of Jedi training - - and even makes a few jokes. Learn more in our latest supplement to the Living Force campaign!

In the past, Master Lanius Qel-Bertuk of the Almas Jedi Academy has been gracious enough to grant interviews with the Cularin media to discuss the "Jedi perspective" on events around the system. While he makes a point to note that he doesn't speak for the Jedi as a whole, his is the voice most of Cularin associates with the Jedi, and his is the face the average "person on the street" associates with the Jedi Order. It has been some time since his last such interview, and a great deal has changed around the system. The Jedi are fewer than they were, the galaxy is at war, and Cularin herself has come under attack. Add to this an increased level of criticism of how the academy is operating, and Master Lanius has much on his mind.

Yara Grugara recently sat down with the Master to discuss these, and other, issues. Because of Lanius's busy schedule, the meeting took place in his office, overlooking the fields of kaluthin that stretch toward the distant southern horizon of Almas.

Yara: Master Lanius, thank you for agreeing to meet with me.

Lanius nods and smiles. He has aged markedly since his last interview with Yara, but he seems alert. He sits with his hands folded on his desk. Yara sits across the desk from him. She's dressed in a conservative gray outfit, a far cry from what she's worn for previous interviews.

Lanius: I'm glad to do it. You're looking well.

Yara (stifling a blush): Thank you. Look, before we start - - my producers, being somewhat cruel, had me review the recordings of our last interview. If I offended you in any way - -

She stops as Lanius holds up his hand and shakes his head.

Lanius: We are who we are. You have nothing to apologize for.

Yara: Well, Yara was wearing purple Jedi robes.

Lanius: Violet, if I recall. And the cut wasn't quite right to be Jedi robes. I don't see what the problem would have been, regardless. Jedi don't

hold a monopoly on bad fashion.

Yara (blinking): That sounded like a joke.

Lanius: Only in the sense that it was meant to be funny, I suppose. Jedi are allowed senses of humor, after all.

It seems to take a moment for Yara to process this information. We see the question play across her face? Are Jedi supposed to be funny?

Yara: Right. So the robes weren't a problem. There was also the issue of Yara calling you "Lan."

Lanius: What you call me doesn't change who I am, underneath. Had it really bothered me to be called "Lan," I would have stopped you. It's not as though you were calling me "Darth Lan," after all.

Yara: Well, and then there was the... well...

Lanius leans back, half-smiling. He seems to know what's coming.

Yara: Yara kind of asked you out. On a date.

Lanius (chuckling): You asked me, if I recall correctly, if I am allowed to date. The answer to which is no, as we established after the interview ended. I was flattered, of course. You're a remarkable woman, who's shown a great deal of personal and professional growth over the past year, and I certainly care deeply for you.

Yara gasps. Lanius belatedly realizes what he's said.

Yara: You do?

Lanius: In the sense that I care deeply for all living creatures. Not that you aren't special and unique - - we all are. Every creature is a critical part of the living Force, you no less than any other. I'm proud of who you have become, in the same way that I'm proud when I see one of our Padawans pass the trials and become a Jedi Knight. I've seen your broadcasts. Yara has graduated to a higher level of empathy and communication.

Yara: So, does that mean you accept Yara's apology?

Lanius: As I said, she has nothing to apologize for. But if it will make her feel better, and she will stop referring to herself in the third person, I will happily accept whatever apology she feels the need to offer.

Yara: Thanks. So, lots to talk about. Shall we start with the big questions, or the small ones?

Lanius: Start wherever you like. If you've got a question you're worried I won't want to answer, it's probably better to get it out of the way now.

Taking a deep breath, Yara checks the datapad she's holding in her lap. She forces a smile and reads the question she finds on the datapad without looking up.

Yara: Master Lanius, there are reports that your pedagogical methods have again been called into question. That the decisions being made in managing the training of young Jedi on Almas may not be reflective of the philosophy of the Jedi Order as a whole, and that there have been a number of complaints filed with the Jedi Temple on Coruscant by Padawans who were either asked to leave the academy, or who chose to do so because being a Jedi was not what they imagined it would be. What response do you have to these statements?

Lanius leans back in his chair, locking his fingers beneath his chin and staring for a few seconds at the ceiling. Then he glances out the window that makes up the southern wall of his office.

Lanius: I've had this conversation so many times...

Yara: If you'd rather not answer, I'll take a "No comment."

Lanius (shaking his head): No. "No comment" isn't what the people of Cularin are going to want to hear. If this question is coming to me through you, then that means other people want answers as well. But the issue is complicated -- on a number of levels.

He stands and walks to the window, then shrugs his shoulders and crosses to lean against his desk, a meter away from where Yara sits.

Lanius: I suppose that my first answer is, there is no "right" way to be a Jedi, so the idea that there might be a right way to teach someone how to be a Jedi is, in itself, strange. Being a Jedi is about learning and following the Jedi code. It's about understanding the role we have in the galaxy -- not just Jedi, but all of us -- and doing what we can to protect life. But the Jedi code is at the center of who we are, and it is at the center of all the teachings here at the academy.

He steps away from the desk and begins to walk back and forth, gesturing, clearly moving into "lecture" mode.

Lanius: The question we have to ask ourselves is whether a single model can possibly fit the diversity of species represented just by the students here on Almas, or even if such a model should be forced to fit, should it exist. Do we want to create Jedi who are all alike? Do we want to train our new generation of Jedi in such a way that their actions are predictable? And no, I'm not saying that Jedi are predictable, or that the training I myself -- and others -- received on Coruscant makes us so. Far from it. But if we were to adopt a single model and use that model to train all Jedi, would it not be easy for us to be targeted for extermination? Even here, there's not a single model. There are the courses, but each student's emphasis will be different, and how that emphasis manifests depends on which Knights a given Padawan studies under, or goes on assignment with.

Yara: What about the complaints? Or the idea that someone might come to Almas to evaluate the academy?

Lanius: If I may address those one at a time? On the issue of complaints, there will always be such. The path of the Jedi is not for everyone. Some who begin training find that they are not well suited to the Order, and pursue

other directions in life. Some, we determine to lack the discipline or character required to be a Jedi Knight, and they are encouraged to explore other options.

Yara: Kicked out, in other words.

Lanius sinks back into the plush chair behind his desk, his hands once more clasped beneath his chin.

Lanius: Some of them feel as though they've been kicked out. Others feel as though they've been given the chance to do something different. The life of a Jedi is very restrictive. Not everyone is happy doing what we do. Not everyone can be. And yes, some of those who are encouraged to leave the Order, to stop following the path of the Jedi, bear us - - often, me personally, since I am the one who makes the final decision and communicates it to such Padawans - - some amount of ill will. If they become angry enough to act against us, that does little but justify the decision we made. I have yet to read a complaint lodged against the academy by a disgruntled former student that did not make it obvious, through the content of the complaint, why the student did not succeed at becoming a Jedi Knight.

Yara: I'm sure you can see how some might find that attitude to be elitist or condescending.

Lanius: Perhaps. Asking a Padawan to leave the Order is not something I do lightly. I stand by every such decision I have been party to. If there is a way for an individual sensitive to the Force to be trained in the Jedi traditions, it is better that we do so. The way of the Jedi provides structure and discipline. It helps the individual who is in tune with the Force utilize that connection in a responsible manner. It would be foolish to routinely train Padawans to a given level and then turn them out on the streets, with no further assistance from the Jedi. It would also be foolish to refuse to train Force-sensitive individuals who might be able to assist in our cause. Do you see the dilemma we face?

Yara: I think so. Could you clarify?

Lanius (leaning forward): It is my responsibility to help protect the galaxy. That is what I do, as a Jedi. The way I have chosen to do this is by training more protectors - - more Jedi. It's in our best interests to train everyone we can. This is a place where the Council and I disagree. They do not believe in taking Padawans past a certain age. I think it's more dangerous to leave individuals who are sensitive to the Force to find their own way. There are influences present in the galaxy that would take these individuals and use them, twist them, encourage them toward the dark side.

So, with the Council's permission, I determined that this academy would be more inclusive. While we do find wonderful individuals to train who might have been overlooked if the more rigorous training model were followed, we also find many who believed it would be exciting to be a Jedi, but for whom the lifestyle - - for whatever reason - - is simply not suitable. On the one hand, I think we should train everyone we can. This seems especially true given how many of my fellow Jedi have already perished in the Clone Wars. But on the other hand, there are more individuals, under this model, who leave the Jedi with their training partially completed. I believe that most of them do

so of their own free will, however, and do not hold any anger in their hearts toward the Jedi.

Yara: What about the idea of a review board or something similar?

Lanius: I'd like to think that with the war going on, the Council would have better uses for its resources than sending anyone to Almas to review our operations. There are those, including myself, who make regular reports to the Council. If they find anything objectionable enough to send personnel here, given the grievous problems in other parts of the galaxy, I will be surprised.

Yara: That last answer sounded - - well, different. Colder? Is there something you know, Master Lanius?

Lanius: I know a lot of things. None that are particularly germane to the topic at hand, though.

With a nod, Yara continues. Her datapad flashes at her, and she puts a hand over its screen.

Yara: You've had some personnel changes here at the academy recently. How are things working out with Mistress Devan, and with the Duros craftsman, Felanil Baaks?

A tight, ironic smile tugs at the corners of Lanius's mouth.

Lanius: First, if I may - - Devan is a Jedi Master. Giving the term a gender is something she finds objectionable, as do I. I'm not trying to control your language, mind you. I'm just telling you what she prefers to be called. That being said, Master Devan is one of the finest lightsaber combatants I've met, from a defensive perspective. If she wants to protect herself or someone else - - that individual will be protected. This allows her to better analyze the defense of her opponents as well, and spot potential weaknesses. She has quick reflexes and is as dexterous a Human as I've met. Beyond that, she's quite bright. She had to step into a difficult position, with Kirlocca's loss, and has done so with grace, dignity, and skill.

As for Baaks, he's one of the most engaging individuals I've ever spoken with, and he knows more about lightsaber construction, history, and theory than anyone in the galaxy, I'd say. We're happier to have him on Almas than I can possibly convey.

Yara: Any thoughts about the war?

Lanius: May it end quickly, and may peace find the galaxy once more.

Yara: Well said. And with that, I think I've just about exhausted my time with you. Thank you for being so kind as to speak with me. Any final words?

Lanius: Yes, in fact. Some for Cularin, and some for you.

Yara: Me?

Lanius (ignoring the question): Cularin, be strong. The future is clouded. I cannot tell what will come of the Clone Wars or the battles we face

on our own doorsteps. But I believe that the Force will guide us, and that in the end, if the heroes of Cularin continue to step forward, Cularin will endure.

Yara: Me?

Lanius (with a gentle smile): Do what is important, but don't lose touch with who you are. Don't feel as though you have to fit the mold of the serious broadcaster so perfectly. Be a serious broadcaster, but don't stop being the Yara Grugara that the people of Cularin know and trust.

Yara: I'm not sure I understand.

Lanius: Smile, Yara. That's what I mean. Life is serious, and we need those who still remember how to take it lightly, at times. We need people who aren't afraid to say what needs to be said. We need people who can call a Jedi Master "Lan."

Fade out.